

# Juvenile Fire Setters

Juvenile fire setters are generally categorized into the following groups:

►Level One – Low Risk

*Low Risk* fire setters are normal children who have mainly been involved in fire play out of curiosity, exploration or by accident. Often called “curiosity fire setters,” these children usually respond well to fire awareness education.

►Level Two – Definite Risk

Socially impaired children who are recurrent fire setters, even after educational intervention, are classified as *Definite Risk* fire setters. They are capable of repeated fire setting episodes and may require further evaluation, counseling or psychotherapy.

►Level Three – Extreme Risk

Emotionally disturbed children who have been involved in numerous fire setting incidents, including arson, and have a history of delinquent and antisocial behavior are classified as *Extreme Risk* fire setters. These children require a complete psychosocial evaluation, accompanied by counseling, psychotherapy and help from other family agencies.

Fact

► Children set approximately one-half of all arson fires.

Some Tell-Tale Signs That Your Child Might be a Fire Setter:

- He/she has an exceptional interest in fire and burning buildings
- He/she asks frequent questions about flammable objects and how they burn
- He/she has matches or lighters in their pockets
- You find charred paper or burnt matches in wastebaskets, toilets or sinks
- You find small burn holes in carpets, clothing or furniture
- Your child’s clothing smells like smoke
- You discover the remnants of small fires of unknown origin in and around your home

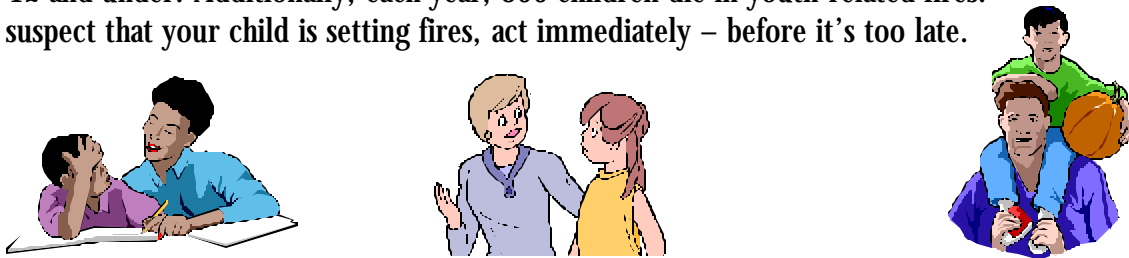


What Can You Do to Prevent Juvenile Fire Setting?

- Teach children from a very young age that fire is not a toy – it is a tool that adults use to cook food and heat homes
- When children are older, begin teaching them the proper uses of fire, under your supervision
- Keep matches and lighters away from young children – hide them in a high cabinet, as you would with other dangerous items like tools, chemicals, medications or knives
- Teach children to turn whatever matches or lighters they find over to you
- Set a good example – children learn about fire safety from others
- Teach your babysitters about fire safety – have a list of emergency numbers posted for your children or babysitter to use
- Beware of novelty lighters that are especially attractive to children – these tend to reinforce the childhood misconception that fire is a toy

Is Your Child a Fire Setter?

Critics generally agree that fire setting after age 8 is almost always deliberate and, without appropriate intervention, can result in injury or death. Death by fire is the leading cause of fatalities in the home for children 12 and under. Additionally, each year, 300 children die in youth-related fires. If you suspect that your child is setting fires, act immediately – before it’s too late.



**Greetings from Governor McGreevey,  
Commissioner Levin and  
State Fire Marshal Petrillo**

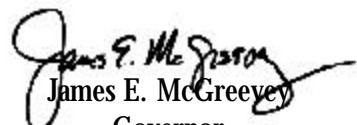
**A**t some point during childhood, most kids become curious about fire. If you feel that your child's fascination with fire poses a threat to your safety and the safety of others, you are not alone.

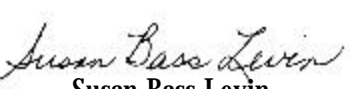
National statistics indicate that juveniles are responsible for approximately half of all arson fires and that the leading cause of fire death for children under 5 is "playing with fire."


Why are some children so mesmerized by fire? Why do they set fires? Most kids are simply curious about fire, but the reasons behind fire setting are vague and complex. Children may set fires for excitement, revenge or satisfaction, or it may be a reaction to stress, anxiety or personal problems. But whatever the reason, juvenile fire setting magnifies the potential for a major accident.

Juvenile fire setting is a serious problem that we cannot afford to ignore. That is why the Department of Community Affairs' (DCA) Division of Fire Safety is providing you this brochure – to offer parents useful and important information about the signs and risks associated with juvenile fire setting and what we all can do to help resolve the problem.

With all good wishes,

  
James E. McGreevey  
Governor

  
Susan Bass Levin  
Commissioner

  
Lawrence Petrillo  
State Fire Marshal



The **Division of Fire Safety** is the central fire service agency in the State, responsible for the development and enforcement of the State Uniform Fire Code, public education programs and firefighter training programs.

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